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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

INFORMATION REPORT

COUNTRY Czechoslovakia

SUBJECT Clash Over Punitive Battalions

REPORT

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1. In spite of opposition in the general staff to the formation of new punitive battalions in the Czechoslovak Army, the government has decided to prolong the existence of these battalions for a year from 1 November 1953. As a result of this decision, General Thor offered his resignation and is now on leave and under surveillance outside Prague.
2. The punitive battalions (pracovni technické prapory, PTP) were organized in 1951, in order to allow the government to send politically unreliable soldiers into the mines or factories. Because of the persistent labor shortage, this method was so abused in 1952 and 1953 that some garrisons lost as much as 18 to 26 percent of their numbers. Many soldiers were designated as politically unreliable solely in order to send them to the mines and thus help in rectifying the country's economic situation.
3. This procedure has been the subject of bitter criticism in the Czechoslovak General Staff. The URO syndicalist organization also protested, as the workers regarded the soldiers as competitors and in some cases drove them from the mines. This caused Cepicka to wish to abolish the PRP as of 1 November 1953, when the new contingent was due to be called up. His proposal caused a violent reaction on the part of Minister of Fuel Jonás; he informed the government that several large mines at Kladno, Most and Moravská Ostrava would have to be closed if the PTP battalions were taken out of the mines.
4. As the shortage of coal in Czechoslovakia has attained catastrophic proportions, the government was obliged to give in and retain the punitive battalions in the mines, but at the same time it took them out of work on non-military construction. The battalions heretofore employed on military construction will be sent to the mines and replaced by civilian workers.

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5. After 1 November 1953 the work of the punitive battalions in the mines will be supervised by a special commission, composed of General Jan Zeman, head of the political administration of the army, Vaclav Pokorny, Deputy Minister of Fuel, and Jan Duhajsky, secretary general of the miners' syndicate.
6. The general staff expects that many of its new conscripts will thus be lost to military service.

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